

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

C O N F I D E N T I A L KUWAIT 005343

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/19/2013

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [SOCI](#) [PHUM](#) [KWMN](#) [KU](#)

SUBJECT: (C) SHAYKH SABAH'S AMBITIOUS AGENDA

Classified By: CDA Frank C. Urbancic for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

1. (C) Summary: Poloffs met with Senior Adviser to the Prime Minister and former GCC Secretary General Abdullah Bishara on November 19. Amongst other topics (septel), Bishara described an ambitious agenda Prime Minister Shaykh Sabah Al-Ahmed hopes to implement in the near-term. End Summary.

2, (C) Prime Minister's Adviser Abdullah Bishara told Poloffs during their November 19 meeting that Prime Minister Shaykh Sabah Al-Ahmed has ambitious plans for domestic reforms, and is "determined" to see them enacted. Characterizing Kuwait as a society "divided" since the 1980's into tribalist (conservative) and urban (liberal) elements, Bishara, a definite liberal, claimed the Prime Minister has embarked on a new political offensive aimed at curbing the influence of Bedouin tribal elements and modernizing Kuwait.

(U) THE PLATFORM

3. (C) Bishara said the GOK has developed its domestic political agenda around the following major issues, all of which he predicts will be contentious: womens' political rights, reducing the number of electoral districts from 25 to 10 (diluting tribal influence and making effective vote-buying more difficult); privatization (which the less educated/skilled tribalists fear will entail large-scale job losses); opening the oil sector to foreign investment; reducing the level of GOK-provided subsidies (known in Kuwait as 'rationalization of expenditures'); dismantling of the welfare state; allowing for private universities; increasing fees charged for private use of public lands; and implementing taxes on road usage.

4. (C) Bishara said Shaykh Sabah hopes to revitalize Kuwait as a "vanguard of originality" (a reference to Kuwait's tradition of openness and free-wheeling parliament), and has chosen Ministers who believe so strongly in the GOK platform that they are willing to endure the fierce political battles which will ensue as the cabinet attempts to push these changes through the National Assembly. He acknowledged that Energy Minister Shaykh Ahmed al-Fahad, a nephew of the Amir and the PM, has strong ties to tribalists and Islamists, but claimed Shaykh Ahmed is a consummate politician, who tailors his pitch to various audiences and is fully on board with Shaykh Sabah's program.

5. (C) Bishara said the GOK strategy is to start by opening the oil sector to foreign investment, given the pressing need for foreign up-to-date technology. Next on the list, in descending order, are privatization, education, womens' issues, and subsidy reduction. Electoral redistricting can wait: the next parliamentary elections are due in 2007.

6. (C) Comment: An informed and influential member of Kuwait's political elite, Bishara was at pains to express that PM Shaykh Sabah and his team are committed to modernizing/re-energizing Kuwait, and to convey optimism despite the certain opposition of Islamists and other conservatives. Success is not assured, however, because the conservatives are also motivated, well financed and committed to their own agenda.

URBANCIC